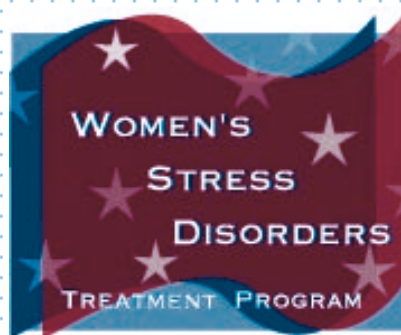


Mindfulness

◆————◆
**Taking hold of
your mind**



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What are the steps in learning mindfulness?

- ◆ We've broken it down into five parts.
- ◆ Try one part at a time so you don't feel too overwhelmed with information.
- ◆ You can begin with "The Basic Concepts".



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Mindfulness

The Basic Concepts



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What is mindfulness?

- ◆ It's a way to get a handle on your mind so your thoughts and feelings don't toss you all over the place.
- ◆ Our mind's "job" is to create thoughts, but sometimes these thoughts and the feelings they create run us ragged.
- ◆ Mindfulness allows you to master your attention so you can create the "safe harbor" in which to make better choices in meeting your needs.



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Is this like religious meditation?

- Although some people use this technique as part of their spiritual practice, we use it as a way to help people control their attention and stop having their impulsive thoughts and feelings rule them.
- Although it sounds easy, it requires lots of practice, so we encourage you to be extra patient with yourself. Remember, everyone is a beginner in the beginning.



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Okay. How do I start?

- ◆ Let's start with a practice about awareness.
- ◆ Fold your hands together the way you usually do. Hold your hands that way for a few seconds.
- ◆ Now switch the way you lace them together. So, if your right thumb was on top last time, lace them so your left thumb is on top now. Hold your hands this way for a few seconds.



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***It doesn't feel "right"
the second way.***

Now slowly alternate back and forth from one way to the other while you ask yourself these questions:

- In which way are you more aware of each finger?
- In which way do you notice the texture of your skin?
- Which way makes your brain more curious?
- Which way feels more comfortable?



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*It's more comfortable
the first way, but I notice my
fingers more the other way.*

- ◆ Good.
- ◆ That's the difference between habitual responses and mindfulness.
- ◆ We want you to learn to be more aware and to act less out of mindless habit.
- ◆ Awareness increases safety.



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Why would awareness make me safer?

- Because you don't get so easily surprised by things.
- Because you can take in and evaluate details that may help you create more choice in your life.
- Because noticing things sooner allows you to fix things sooner so you suffer less.



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Say more about reducing suffering

Noticing thoughts, sensations and emotions without letting them steer every moment gives you the calm needed to make decisions about how to take care of problems in your life rather than being run aground by them.



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***Sometimes it feels like I'm
on a runaway train
going off a cliff***

- ◆ Yeah.
- ◆ And somehow you seem to keep getting back on that train and going towards the cliff again and again, right?



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Yeah! Why is that?

- ➔ You remember how we said the mind's job is to create thoughts?
- ➔ Well, feelings have their own style too. They just *love* themselves and will do anything to keep generating emotion, to keep returning to paying attention to themselves.



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Will mindfulness help control that too?

- Yes.
- It helps your “calmer head” prevail.
- You can learn that strong feelings do not necessarily mean something is actually as important in making a long range decision as it feels.
- By giving feelings the amount of attention they deserve, but no more, you can make room for your “calmer head” to prevail.



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***I always thought it
was good to feel
my feelings.***

- Feeling your feelings is fine. Latching onto them at the peak of their intensity and feeding them tends to create more problems than it solves.
- Feelings are simply one piece of information. You can use them as “you’re getting warmer” or “you’re getting colder” messages to guide your choices. They shouldn’t, however, be the only guide.



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So, don't ignore my feelings, but also don't feed them?

- ◆ Exactly. By noticing them without automatically giving in to them, you can evaluate how much importance they merit.
- ◆ Sometimes your feelings or your ideas about how to respond are simply a habit.
- ◆ Focusing only on your feelings simply because they are strong is not the most useful choice.



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So is it like just enduring these feelings?

- Noticing them without impulsively reacting might be a better description. What works best is to neither fight off feelings nor embrace them.
- Mindfulness can give you the room to decide whether tolerating a particular feeling in the short term will help you meet your long range goals, or if it makes more sense to address the underlying problem.



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***Do you have an example
of when I should ride
out feelings?***

- ➔ It depends upon your long range goals, but here's an example.
- ➔ Some people are terrified of getting a shot at the doctor's office. One way to respond to that is to act entirely out of that fear and never go to the doctor's office, even when you are sick, so you will never have to feel that fear. Most people would agree that this is not a good long term plan.



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***So you should just
ignore the feeling?***

Not exactly. Always ignoring feelings often results in them becoming even stronger. It is possible to respect your feelings (terror at the thought of going to the doctor) as well as your long range goal (staying healthy) by choosing not to act on them (going to rather than running from the doctor's office).



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How would I do that?

For example, because you are aware of your fear, you might decide to bring a friend along to reassure you, or you may reward yourself with a movie after you go to the doctor's office.



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It sounds like a good idea. How do I start?

- ◆ What we will teach you is a way to notice your thoughts, sensations and emotions in a new way.
- ◆ There are a couple of things to keep in mind that can help you with this.



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What are they?

- First, it is important to approach your practice with curiosity and compassion.
- We want you to become deeply curious about what is actually occurring and to do that in a “care-full” way, that is, in a way full of caring for yourself.
- The second part is to abandon judgment about any particular sensation, thought or feeling.



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That doesn't sound too hard

- ◆ It doesn't, but your mind might surprise you. Our minds sometimes stray a long way from our goals.
- ◆ Since we're practicing doing a familiar thing (having thoughts and feelings) in an unfamiliar way, our mind may habitually slide back into old habits.
- ◆ Fortunately, this tendency allows us to practice returning to mindfulness many times. The goal is being able to return.



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*Can you say more
about how to bring
back my attention?*

Jack Kornfield suggests approaching mindfulness the same way you would approach paper training a puppy. When the puppy wanders around and piddles in the wrong corner, the best way to teach it where to go is *not* to yell at it. Just gently bring it back to the paper.



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So how does that relate?

- ◆ The mind is like that puppy - it wanders around, getting distracted from what you had originally intended to do.
- ◆ As with the puppy, the most effective approach is to gently bring the mind back to where we want it to be.
- ◆ The goal of mindfulness is to keep our mind focused where we want it to focus.



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Mindfulness



The first steps



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***I think I get the attitude.
How do I actually begin?***

- ◆ There are a couple of different ways.
- ◆ You can focus mindfully on your breathing.
- ◆ You can focus mindfully on a different sensory experience.
- ◆ We'll give you examples and practices for both.



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How would I focus on my breathing?

- First, find a comfortable seated position. Lying down tends to make people sleepy, so unless you have back problems that are worsened by sitting, try sitting in a straight-backed chair.
- Simply notice your breath with curiosity.
- Do not try to change it in any way.



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What about my breathing should I pay attention to?

- Whatever sensation it is that keeps you the most focused on it.
- This seems to work in different ways for each person. You can focus on the sound of your breath or the rise and fall of your chest and belly, or the sensation of air moving in and out of your nostrils. Give this a try now.



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I can do it for a little while, but then I lose track.

- ➔ Exactly! That's the way our minds wander, like that puppy.
- ➔ The skill you're working on developing is bringing your mind back, so every time it wanders you have another chance to practice.
- ➔ Each person tends to have habitual ways their mind wanders.



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Like what?

- ◆ For some people, body sensations are the main thing they notice that pulls them away from their breathing.
- ◆ Most of us ignore our body sensations all day, so it can be surprising to become aware of what we are feeling where in our bodies.



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***I noticed I felt
worried.***

- Feelings are another common thing that pulls people away from focusing on their breathing.
- People may tend towards one feeling more often than another, but all feelings and sensations are handled the same way in mindfulness meditation practice.



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How is that?

- ◆ You just note to yourself that it occurred and let it pass away.
- ◆ Avoid judging the sensation, thought or feeling.
- ◆ Don't try to push it away, but don't latch onto it either.



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Why would this help?

- What we're trying to do is practice increasing your awareness in a way that can "unstick" you from vicious cycles of thoughts or feelings.
- To change what is happening, you must first know what is actually happening (versus your thoughts or feelings about what is happening).



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***But I'm in a lot of pain.
Why would I want
to notice that?***

- ◆ Naming what is actually happening is the first step in taming it. You can note the pain sensations in a way that makes them more tolerable.
- ◆ You may have noticed a difference in how confident you feel (and how successful you are) in handling a problem when you choose to describe it as “challenging” rather than “my worst nightmare”.



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How does that relate to pain?

- ➔ Even saying “the left side of my lower back is cramping” or “I feel strong grief” can make sensations more manageable than when you label it “agony” or say “I can’t stand it”.
- ➔ The thoughts and labels you attach to sensations influence how you experience them.



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***So just calling it something
else can make it better?***

- ◆ In a way, yes, but that's a little down the road.
- ◆ First we want you to learn how to separate your judgments about things (that is, your thoughts) from the thing itself (your actual sensations).



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*I'd just as soon not start
with focusing on my
aching back*

- Good idea. But, enough talking.
- Let's try another mindfulness practice that you can do anywhere.
- We'll practice on something pleasant.
- If you like oranges, you can begin by paying attention to the sensations associated with eating an orange (or choose another fruit) .



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Eating an orange will help me?

- ◆ It will give you a chance to practice taking charge of your attention and to learn to separate sensations from the thoughts you attach to them.
- ◆ Grab an orange (or some other piece of fruit you like) right now so you can practice this.



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Okay, I've got one.

- ❑ You can begin by noticing how the surface of the fruit feels different in different spots, the way the color varies from one section to another, how it feels in your mouth before you bite into it, and how sweet or sour it tastes. Does it make a sound when you bite into a slice?
- ❑ Try noticing what your senses tell you for a minute or two...



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Okay. I'm noticing...

- ★ As much as you can during this practice, bring your attention back to what you are actually seeing, touching, smelling or tasting...
- ★ That includes letting positive judgments ("this is the best fruit I've ever had") pass through.



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What do you mean, let it pass through?

- ◆ You can notice it the way you might notice scenery on a long drive - you see it, then it's gone.
- ◆ Another way to think about this is to let the fleeting thoughts or sensations blow by, like clouds on a windy day, or leaves on a stream.



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Okay, let me try again

- ◆ So, just keep noticing what you actually sensing, what you are actually taking in through your senses.
- ◆ Are you also noticing your breathing from time to time?



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***Yeah. It's changed
some.***

- ◆ That's often true.
- ◆ It might be slower or you might be more aware of when you're holding your breath, or sighing a lot, or breathing shallowly.
- ◆ At some point the mind takes us elsewhere, away from noticing our breath or what our senses tell us.



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Like the puppy?

Yes. In the middle of this did you start thinking about other times you've had oranges or why is this one so sour or you can't believe how much oranges cost these days and oh yeah, I've got to get groceries tonight I better hurry up and finish this silly practice.....?



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Yeah! It was like I just drifted away before I knew it.

- ➔ Great! You've done the first step of mindfulness, noticing that your mind's attention wandered away.
- ➔ Awareness of what is happening is always the first step in taking charge of it.



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So, is that drifting common?

- ◆ Very common. The mind's job is to generate thoughts. It can even trick you into thinking you're not thinking.
- ◆ The mind habitually works in that wandering around, distracting kind of way. Even in the midst of pleasant experiences we tend to put our attention elsewhere.



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***So, how do I keep my
mind from wandering
so much?***

- ◆ Even with a lot of practice, your mind will wander some, but you can improve your focus.
- ◆ The skill we're focusing on is how to *come back to* mindfulness, not necessarily stay there all the time.
- ◆ Focusing on breathing or other physical sensations is one way to come back home to yourself.



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***So I should try to slow
my breathing down***

- Actually, just like our earlier practice, the goal is to notice what's happening, rather than trying to change it into something else.
- So just start noticing it again and abandon any idea that you need to change your breathing in some way.



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Okay.

- ◆ When you get pulled away from noticing your breathing by thoughts or sensations or feelings, gently bring yourself back to your breath by noticing the sound or feeling of air moving into and out of your body.
- ◆ Let go of any judgments about how skilled you are at this.

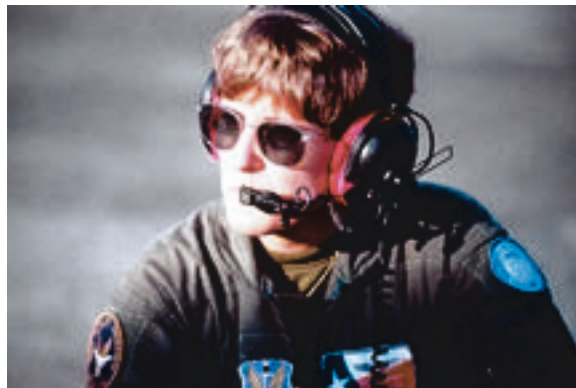


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***I don't think I understand
the judgment part***

- ◆ That is one of the ideas that is very new to most people.
- ◆ Let's focus a little more on that, because it is important in mindfulness practice.

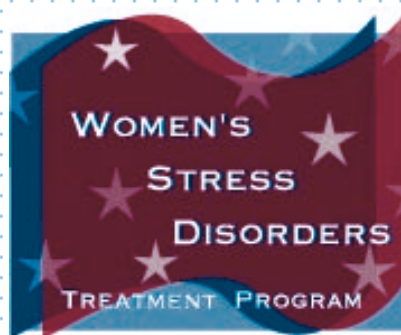


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Mindfulness

Sorting out sensations and facts
from judgments and feelings



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Letting go of that judgment is hard

- ◆ Yeah, especially because that is the way that our minds habitually travel.
- ◆ Here's how wacky our brains can be: most people get caught up in judging themselves negatively because they judged themselves!



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***Well, I have to admit.....
But how would I avoid that?***

It helps to separate out the facts (what is actually happening) from your shorthand way of describing what is happening (your judgment).



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So sensations are not the same as feelings and judgments?

- ➔ Right. Sensations are the information your senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) take in, the facts.
- ➔ Judgments and feelings are the labels we attach to those sensations.
- ➔ You want to try a practice about sorting those two out?



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***Yes. Can you give me
an example?***

Sure. For anyone new to mindfulness practice, what happens is that you notice your breathing for one or two breaths, then your mind wanders and, after a minute you notice it wandered and then tell yourself to focus on your breathing again. Those are the facts.



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So what would be a judgment?

- A negative judgment would be, “I’m not very good at this, I can’t even notice my breathing for 30 seconds”.
- A positive version (which we also want you to let go of) would be, “I’m pretty good at this, I brought my attention back to my breath after only 30 seconds”.
- Let’s practice the nonjudgmental part, okay?



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Sure.

- Okay. You can practice right now by noticing three sounds you hear in this moment.
- Note to yourself what you hear in a nonjudgmental way (e.g., “a bird chirping” not “a beautiful bird chirping” or “an annoying bird chirping”).



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Then what?

- ◆ Then note three things you are experiencing through your sense of sight and three things through your sense of touch.
- ◆ You want an example?



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Yeah.

Here's what I note: "I hear a voice, I hear the air conditioning, I hear the air coming out when I breathe. I see gray fabric, I see a wooden table, I see my right hand. I feel my left heel on the floor, I feel my shirt against my skin, I feel my back against the chair".



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It's that ordinary?

- ◆ Yep. Just use whatever sensations are available.
- ◆ You can try that yourself now a few times.
- ◆ Just cycle through three things you see, three things you hear, three things you feel a few times.



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Wow. I feel calmer.

- That's a pretty common reaction. Part of that is because your breathing slows and steadies when you pay close attention to something
- You have probably experienced this before when you were doing something you were so engaged in, maybe drawing or ice skating, that you didn't judge yourself.



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Isn't it natural to make judgments?

- ◆ It is definitely habitual - that's what the mind does - but habits can be changed.
- ◆ Judgments are just a shorthand way of describing what's happening.
- ◆ The problem with judgments is that it's easy to forget it's shorthand.



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Do you have an example?

- Sure. You might say, “I’m such an idiot”, when it is really shorthand for “I forgot to mail the credit card bill in on time again and now I’m going to have to pay a late fee”.
- Attaching the “idiot” judgment causes you to suffer unnecessarily, plus it keeps you stuck in that feeling rather than focused on handling the actual problem.



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I see your point.

- ◆ Great.
- ◆ People often get stuck in the idea that everyone labels a particular sensation the same way, so then they think they're stuck with that.
- ◆ We think it can be different than that, and this difference can reduce your suffering. Ready?



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Sure.

Okay.

The feeling label that gets attached to any physical sensation is different for different people based on, among other things, what you've experienced in the past, what else is happening in that moment, and your evaluation of how skilled you are in that situation.



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We could label the exact same sensation something different?

Right.

For example, if you love rock climbing, standing on the edge of a cliff might cause you to breathe more rapidly and your muscles may tighten. You might label that feeling “excited”. If your friend is afraid of heights, at the edge of a cliff she will also probably breathe more rapidly and her muscles will tighten. However, she would probably call those sensations “fear”.



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***So, the sensations are
the same but not the label.***

Right.

**In fact, particular sensations don't even
get labeled as the same feeling within
one person.**



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***I'll bet you have
another example.***

- ◆ You guessed it. A child who has never gone down a sledding hill may begin to take shallow breaths and tighten her stomach muscles. At first she may start near the bottom of the hill but gradually start from higher and higher up the hill. By the end of the afternoon her sensations may not have changed, but it is likely she changed her label of those sensations from "fear" to "excitement".
- ◆ That kind of thing ever happen to you?



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***Yeah, I used to be
scared to talk at meetings.
Now I like it.***

So, at first you probably had butterflies in your stomach and maybe got a dry mouth. And you probably still have both of those sensations, but you have more experience and actually interpret them differently, as excitement or as being “jazzed up”.



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***So, as I get more experience
and feel more confident....***

- ◆ Right. Experience and skill practice builds confidence.
- ◆ And by learning ways to separate sensations from the thoughts and labels you attach to them, you can have more comfort and choice in your life.



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Okay, I think I get it

- ➔ Let's talk some more about the general qualities of mindfulness that we're after.
- ➔ We want to help you learn to integrate your thoughts and feelings in a way that helps you make wise choices for yourself.



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***So, it's not just about
not having feelings?***

- ◆ Feelings are important - they give us information, they help us connect with others, they make us human.
- ◆ Creating a way to get to “a happy medium” between thoughts and feelings is one way to think of the goal of mindfulness.



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***It's really a lot of work
to stay focused in that way!***

- Right. From the outside it looks like you're not doing anything, but as you've experienced, it requires perseverance and strong intention to practice mindfulness.
- Here are some ideas about how to come back to this kind of attention when your mind wanders.



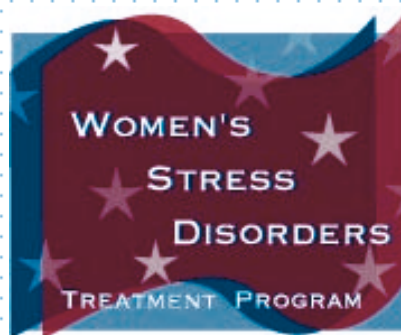
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Mindfulness

◆————◆

**Skills for bringing your
attention back**



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What are the skills I need?

- ◆ We touched on this a bit earlier. One skill that is helpful is to “note” or describe what is happening the same way you did with the three things you hear, see and feel.
- ◆ The great thing about using physical sensations is that you always have your body with you to draw upon.



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What else helps?

- ◆ Everyone has thoughts of various kinds that run through their mind.
- ◆ It is sometimes helpful to have categories of thoughts so you don't have to pay too much attention to them as they pass by.



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For example?

“Thinking” is a very broad category. It might work as a way to categorize the things that pass through your mind, though some people use these more specific categories:

- Planning
- Thinking about myself
- Thinking about others
- Remembering



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I have a lot of physical sensations I notice

- ➔ Most people ignore their body much of the day so some of the first things people notice are uncomfortable sensations.
- ➔ So, you could describe them as “sensations” or be a bit more specific, such as “sensations in my hand” or “tension in my back”. Describe them as neutrally as possible.



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What do I do with feelings?

- ◆ The same general approach of noting them without latching onto them applies to feelings.
- ◆ You can note them as “feelings” or “anger” or “fear”, whatever helps you simply notice them and let them pass through.



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Are you sure they'll pass through?

- ◆ Absolutely, as long as you don't grab onto them so tightly they can't escape.
- ◆ Feelings often shift slightly from moment to moment, so for example you may note, "rage, rage, anger, anger, resentment, irritation" in a matter of minutes if you allow your feelings to go where they will.



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If I'm angry it gets worse, not better when I notice it.

- ◆ Sometimes that's true, but it still will shift if you give it time.
- ◆ By noticing feelings mindfully you won't need to get swept away by them.
- ◆ Notice whether or not you get caught up in remembering why you feel that way, the story behind the feeling.



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Yeah, I guess I do.

- ➔ That is one of the ways our mind keeps us stuck in the same feeling state.
- ➔ You remember we said that feelings absolutely *love* themselves? Here's an example of the thoughts that might go on in someone's head during 30 seconds of a mindfulness practice.



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Go ahead

“Anger...anger...anger...back to my breath...hearing air move...chest rising...jaw tight...anger...why did he treat me like that, I don’t deserve that, he is such a jerk, all I did was...oh, yeah, breathing out...chest rising...but he really is a jerk, who does he think he is...oh, breathing ...breathing...”



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***So that person wasn't
doing a very good job
of mindfulness***

- Actually, she was practicing quite well. She noticed her mind drifted and brought it back, even if it only lasted for one or two breaths.
- Did you notice how quickly the story of why she had those feelings pulled her away from her breathing and the present moment?



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***Yeah. It happened
before she knew it.***

- Getting a hold on your attention rather than latching onto thoughts and feelings requires a lot of practice.
- Does this mindfulness practice make sense to you?



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***I don't get why I need
to be neutral if something
feels good***

- ◆ Whenever you get attached to something (which happens when you latch onto it or judge it in either a positive or negative way), it takes hold of you.
- ◆ It's obvious why no one likes it when the negative thing takes hold.



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But it's not okay to get attached to positives either?

- We want you to be fully aware of pleasurable things when they are happening, but to let go of both the idea that they will stay and of any attempts at getting them to stay .
- When you get attached to positives it is dangerously easy to shift your focus into worrying about when the good feelings will disappear.



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*Isn't that kind of disengaged,
like a robot?*

- ◆ Actually, the result is just the opposite. Remember the earlier practice with the orange?
- ◆ Mindfulness, like every new thing you learn feels odd and clunky at first.
- ◆ Mindfulness helps you to participate in life as it is actually happening.



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***So, when I'm not mindful
is when I'm actually
more disengaged?***

- Exactly. Mindfulness is a way of “being here now” that ensures you are engaged in the present rather than, as the author James Joyce says of one of his characters, living “a few feet from his body”.
- Let's look at some ideas about how to use mindfulness in your everyday life.

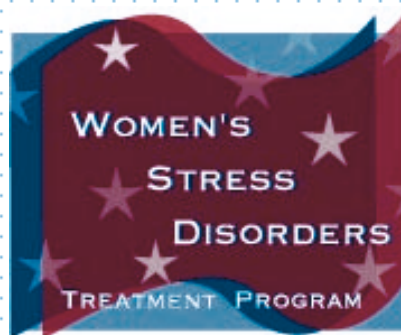


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Mindfulness

How does this work
in everyday life?



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If I only focus on one thing how will I ever get anything done?

- ◆ We're suggesting focusing on one thing *at a time*, not necessarily only ever having one project or role in your life as a whole. Your life will feel richer if you can focus on the one you are doing when you are doing it.
- ◆ When your attention is split in two or more places due to fear that you might be missing something better or not accomplishing the right thing, then nothing ever seems to be good enough.



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How could I be mindful without closing my eyes?

- Remember the practice with the orange? Allow yourself to pay attention in that way, non-judgmentally, with curiosity.
- Practice doing things, like washing dishes, just to experience doing them (so, not focused on the goal of clean dishes).



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***So how does all this
help me in the real
world?***

When you are aware of what is actually going on (versus what you wish were going on, or think should be going on, or went on in the past, or might happen in the future) you can make more effective choices.



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***That sounds good.
I want to make the
right choice.***

- ◆ Just so we're clear here, the most effective choice isn't necessarily the "right" choice.
- ◆ Sometimes people act in the "right" way by following the rules as they are written out, and get rigid about following them, and stuck in the belief that others will follow them as well.



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For example?

- If you've ever come to a four-way stop at a busy time, you know that some people pull out before their turn, despite knowing the law.
- Many people do the "right" thing by pulling out when it's their turn, even though another car is now in the way, rather than doing the "wrong" (though effective) thing, which is to wait until it is safe to pull out.



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How might that would help me in personal relationships?

- ◆ It can help you sort out what “should” be true, or what you *wish* were true (my spouse “should” always be loving and compassionate) from what is *actually* true (sometimes he is tired and cranky).
- ◆ Making that distinction helps you figure out the most *effective* course of action (for example, you might want to bring up problems you’re having with your spouse when he has rested and relaxed).



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Okay, I'll give it a try

Great!

Any amount of practicing you can do will help you reduce suffering and increase your satisfaction in your life.



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